

VOLUNTARY PLACEMENT AGREEMENTS

Overview

Senate Bill 923 and House Bill 1453 were established to correct a significant problem in the provision of mental health services for children in Missouri. These bills established a statewide protocol that allows parents to gain mental health services for their children in residential settings, without relinquishing custody of their child, through a voluntary placement agreement (VPA). DMH and the Department of Social Services' Children's Division (CD) work together to provide supports through this process.

The entry point for a VPA can vary in that a parent may tell a Regional Office (RO) or Community Mental Health Center (CMHC) staff member that they feel they can no longer provide adequate support to their child or the family may inform CD directly that they are unable to continue supporting their child at home. Given the nature of habilitative services through the RO, it would be expected that children with DD would require services through a VPA in only very rare circumstances. Because habilitative services are typically provided at home to children and the need for placement usually only occurs when a child has been removed from the home or has lost their primary care giver(s), SCs should anticipate providing in-home services rather than residential services in cases where parents are struggling to support their child at home.

Procedures

1. CD applies their established Custody Diversion Protocol and identifies a child who may require residential placement for the sole purpose of gaining mental health services.
2. CD notifies the local Regional Office and CPS Administrative Agent and an evaluation of the child occurs within 72 hours of this notice.
3. Designated Regional Office staff evaluates the child to determine if the child is eligible for Division services (if the child is not known to any RO) and what habilitative supports, if any, are required for the child to remain with his/her family.
4. Designated staff from the local CPS Administrative Agent also evaluates the child for services from that Division.
5. If either the Regional Office or CPS AA believes that the child requires out of home placement, a VPA is established with the parents and the pertinent DMH Division(s).
6. Under policies established by CD, a VPA cannot exceed 180 days in duration without specific approval from the CD.
7. The VPA stipulates the type and duration of out of home services, the requirement of parents to be involved in the planning and provision of mental health services as prescribed by the RO or AA, and the financial obligation of the parents to contribute to the cost of services based on CD's assessment of their income.

8. If it is determined that service can be provided in home, the RO reports that in their evaluation and these services are offered to the family, in lieu of out of home services. The provision of these services does not require the signing of a VPA.

Support Coordinator's (Formally Known as Service Coordinators) Responsibilities

1. SCs working with children should have a thorough understanding of the Division's philosophy of service provision to children and understand that children can remain with their parents and receive appropriate habilitative services at home, in most cases. SCs should work closely with their supervisor and RO management staff when working with children identified through the VPA protocol.
2. SCs may be involved in the evaluation of a child under the VPA protocol or may be assigned to provide service coordination after a VPA has been established. In either case, SCs who are assigned to a child whose parents have signed a VPA are responsible for arranging any needed habilitation services identified through the evaluation.
3. If a SC is working with a child who is eligible for RO services and whose parents have signed a VPA in order to gain out of home services due to a mental illness, the SC is a part of that child's support team and is responsible to arrange any ancillary services needed either during placement or following the return of the child to their parents' home.

Voluntary Placement Agreement (Form)

<http://www.dss.mo.gov/cd/info/forms/pdf/vpa/vpa.pdf>